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THE BEST PLAYS OF THE OLD DRAMATISTS.

THOMAS DEKKER

EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES,

BY ERNEST RHYS.

"I lie and dream of your full Mermaid wine."—*Beaumont.*

UNEXPURGATED EDITION.

LONDON:
VIZETELLY & CO., 42, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.
1887.

" What things have we seen
Done at the Mermaid ! heard words that have been
So nimble, and so full of subtle flame,
As if that every one from whence they came
Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,
And had reso.ved to live a fool the rest
Of his dull life."

Master Francis Beaumont to Ben Jonson.

" Souls of Poets dead and gone,
What Elysium have ye known,
Happy field or mossy cavern,
Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern ? "

Keats.

LONDON :
BRADBURY, AGNEW, & CO., PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS

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THOMAS DEKKER.

IN Henslowe's Diary, among the curious items which Alleyn's fellow manager in the Fortune and other theatres set down concerning his transactions in the plays of the time, the name of a certain "Mr. Dickers," will be found under date 8th of January, 1597. In this way, the adventure of Thomas Dekker into the precarious field of dramatic authorship is first recorded for us. The entry refers to some twenty shillings "lent unto Thomas Dowton" to buy a book of Dekker's, no doubt the MS. of some play written by him, the name of which, however, is not given. A week later, a second entry notes again a disbursement, this time of four pounds, also for a book of his "called Fayeton" (Phaeton), possibly a further part of the same work. The third entry referring to him is ominous: "Lent unto the companey, the 4 of febreary 1598, to disecharge Mr. Dicker owt of the

cownter in the powltrey, the some of fortie shillings. I saye dd to Thomas Dowton. . . . . xxxx^{s}." In the sorry indication of these three entries, showing first the promising emergence of the young playwright, and then immediately the coming of disaster upon him, and his being lodged for debt in "the Counter in the Poultry," we have at once the key to Dekker's career. Dekker, perhaps the most original and most striking figure among the lesser known men of that brilliant array which follows Marlowe, is at the same time one of the most unfortunate in his life and its artistic outcome, judged by the standard of his own genius. It was as if Fortune, to take a figure from his own play, having first presented him with the gift which, as a poet of the time, he most desired,—the playwright's great opportunity, then turned upon him, and said,—

"But now go dwell with cares, and quickly die."

If, however, he lived with cares, he laughed at them, and he was too strong to let them kill him outright. But, nevertheless, there they were; they never perhaps quite upset that undaunted good-humour of his, but they defeated him as an artist, they allied themselves insidiously with his own natural weaknesses to defeat the consummation of a really great poetic faculty.

Dekker, however, is one of those authors whose personal effect tends to outgo the purely artistic one. He has the rare gift of putting heart into

everything he says, and because of this abounding heartiness of his, it is hard to measure him by the absolute standards of criticism. Indeed, after the endless shortcomings and disappointments of his verse and prose have been estimated and written against him, he remains, after all has been set down, still the same lovable, elusive being, a man of genius, a child of nature. For this reason, it is disappointing that so little is to be actually known of his life. As one reads his plays, and marks the strong individuality shown in them, the desire to know how he adjusted himself to the everyday life, and took its little defeats and encouragements, springs very strongly. It is the natural interest that one takes in men of his cordial humanity, and it is disappointing to be balked of its satisfaction.

The outline of Dekker's life is indeed singularly blank. We do not know exactly when he was born, or where; there is scarcely any clue to the important period of his youth, and his early struggles as a poet and playwright; we do not even know when he died. A few further entries in Henslowe's Diary, whose value an uneasy sense of J. Payne Collier's editorial methods tends to depreciate, and a few incidental references in Dekker's own works, chiefly in the dedications and introductions to his plays, form the whole of the exact record which we have to rely upon.

In the dedication to *Match Me in London*, perhaps the most interesting of all the plays by him

not included in this volume, which was published in 1631, he says, sadly enough, "I have been a Priest in Apollo's Temple many years, my voice is decaying with my Age, yet yours being clear and above mine shall much honour me, if you but listen to my old tunes." Again in 1637, in the dedicatory epistle of his prose tract, *English Villainies Seven Several Times Pressed to Death*, he refers more definitely to his "three-score years." Sixty years back from 1637 gives us 1577, but as Collier[1] tells us that he was married before 1594, and as we know that he had already won recognition as a young playwright in 1597, it will be well to read the term "three-score years" pretty freely, as meaning generally the term between sixty and seventy, and to put down the date of his birth at about the year 1569—70, or even a little earlier.

There is less uncertainty about his birthplace: various references in his prose tracts prove pretty certainly that he was born in London, as seems so fit in one of the most devoted of those poets who have celebrated the English capital. "O thou beautifullest daughter of two united Monarchies!" he cries, in his *Seven Deadly Sins of London;* "from thy womb received I my being, from thy breasts my nourishment." This is confirmed by similar passages in the *Dead Term*, *The Rod for Runaways*, and other of the prose pamphlets. The particular spot in London where he was born is not however to be learnt, although Collier sur-

[1] "Memoirs of Actors," xvi., xvii,

mises that he was born in Southwark. The name itself,—whether Dekker or Decker, suggests a Dutch origin, which is further corroborated by the curious knowledge shown in the plays and prose tracts of Dutch people and Dutch books, to say nothing of the frequent Dutch realism of Dekker's dramatic method. Dr. Grosart, whose indefatigable energy of research was probably never exercised to so little purpose in the case of any author, discovered on the title-page of one copy of the civic "Entertainment" by Dekker, *Troia-Nova-Triumphans, or London Triumphing*, the words "Merchant-Tailor" written opposite his name, as if by one who had known him. From this we may again conjecture that his father was a tailor, and that possibly the boy went to Merchant Tailor's School, and was intended for that trade. The intimate knowledge of the daily routine of tailors' and shoemakers' shops displayed in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, and other of the plays, bear every evidence of being drawn from actual experience. It is not a very wild imagination, therefore, to imagine that the boy Dekker may have been apprenticed in the ordinary way as a shoemaker or tailor, making escape from the craftsman's life as his poetic ambition grew hot, and at last inevitable, in its hazardous issue upon the path of a playwright and man of letters.

It is only by free inference from his works that we can possibly fill up the early part of his life, until, in 1597, as already noted, we find him com-

mitted to the life of an author and playwright, and tasting, no doubt, of its sweets, as in the early part of 1598 he had a sharp foretaste of its bitterness. Much of the description in his plays casts a vivid light upon this wild life of the playhouse and tavern which he, with other young poets of the extraordinary decade terminating the sixteenth century must have lived. Some of the scenes in *The Honest Whore*, and again in *Satiromastix* and other of the lesser known comedies, are full of this interest; and luminous passages also occur in the plays of his various collaborators. In some of his own prose works, especially in his singular guide to the gallant's life in Elizabethan London, *The Gull's Horn Book*, Dekker has indirectly supplied a still more realistic account of the life lived by the young bloods who frequented the playhouses and taverns. From this inimitable book one gathers much curious detail for the picture of Dekker's daily surroundings. In Chapter V., which is headed, "How a Gallant should behave himself in an Ordinary," the young hero of the period is advised to repair to the "ordinary," or eating-house, so early as "some half-hour after eleven; for then you shall find most of your fashion-mongers planted in the room waiting for meat." Amongst the types of gallant to whom Dekker gives special advice as to behaviour at the ordinary, is the poet:—

"If you be a Poet," he says, "and come into the Ordinary; though it can be no great glory to be an ordinary Poet; order yourself

thus. Observe no man; doff not cap to that gentleman to-day at dinner, to whom, not two nights since, you were beholden for a supper; but, after a turn or two in the room, take occasion, pulling out your gloves, to have some *Epigram*, or *Satire*, or *Sonnet* fastened in one of them . . . Marry, if you chance to get into your hands any witty thing of another man's, that is somewhat better; I would counsel you then, if demand be made who composed it, you may say: 'Faith, a learned Gentleman, a very worthy friend.' And this seeming to lay it on another man will be counted either modesty in you, or a sign that you are not ambitious of praise, or else that you dare not take it upon you for fear of the sharpness it carries with it."

At dinner, directions are given in the same vein of irony, as to the manner of eating and so forth; and after dinner, among other occupations and diversions proposed for the afternoon figures the play. The next chapter is devoted accordingly to expounding "How a Gallant should behave himself in a Playhouse." From the point of view of Dekker's dramatic work, this is naturally the most interesting part of the book. It gives us a vivid idea of the associations which would colour his thoughts as, the dinner hour over, the stream of gallants, 'prentices and so forth, issued from the ordinaries, the fashionable promenade in the Middle Aisle of St. Paul's, and elsewhere, and wended their way at afternoon to the play. Dekker, it is quite evident, speaks feelingly, remembering his own troubles, in these ironical counsellings to the "Gull," who in his seat on the stage seems to have acted as a sort of irresponsible *chorus*, hindering rather than aiding the understanding of the play, however, and resented equally by the play-

wright and the playgoers in pit or gallery. "Whither," proceeds the Horn Book,—

"Whither therefore the gatherers of the public, or private Playhouse stand to receive the afternoon's rent; let our Gallant having paid it, presently advance himself up to the Throne of the stage; I mean not into the lord's room, which is now but the stage's suburbs; no, ... but on the very rushes where the comedy is to dance, yea, and under the state of Cambyses himself, must our feathered ostrich, like a piece of ordnance, be planted valiantly, because impudently, beating down the mews and hisses of the opposed rascality." Here it continues—"By sitting on the stage, you may, without travelling for it, at the very next door ask whose play it is; and, by that *Quest* of *Inquiry*, the law warrants you to avoid much mistaking; if you know not the author, you may rail against him, and peradventure so behave yourself, that you may enforce the author to know you."

The refinements of torture to which the Elizabethan playwright was subject under this arrangement, must indeed have been infinite. Dekker further enlarges with the piteous irony of a long-suffering experience:—

"It shall crown you with rich commendation, to laugh aloud in the middest of the most serious and saddest scene of the terriblest tragedy; and to let that clapper, your tongue, be tossed so high, that all the house may ring of it."

Again, even more suggestively—

"Now, sir; if the writer be a fellow that hath either epigrammed you, or hath had a flirt at your mistress, or hath brought either your feather, or your red beard, or your little legs, etc., on the stage; you shall disgrace him worse than by tossing him in a blanket, or giving him the bastinado in a tavern, if, in the middle of his play, be it Pastoral or Comedy, Moral or Tragedy, you rise with a screwed and discontented face from your stool to be gone."

From another passage, it is clear that the first arrival of the gallant upon the stage, as seen from

the front of the house, must have been almost as striking as this precipitate exit.

"Present not yourself on the stage," it advises "especially at a new play, until the quaking Prologue hath, by rubbing, got colour into his cheeks, and is ready to give the trumpets their cue that he is upon point to enter; for then it is time, as though you were one of the properties, or that you dropt out of the hangings, to creep from behind the arras, with your tripos or three-footed stool, in one hand, and a teston (tester,—sixpence) mounted between a forefinger and a thumb in the other."

From the ordinary to the playhouse, from the playhouse to the tavern, the satirist follows still as good-humouredly:—"the next places that are filled, after the playhouses be emptied are, or ought to be, taverns; into a tavern then let us next march, where the brains of one hogshead must be beaten out to make up another."

The ordinary, the playhouse, the tavern:—Dekker no doubt knew them only too well, but it is not to be inferred because of this that his life was an idle one. His extraordinary energy, at the beginning of his career at any rate, becomes clear when we turn to the record of his plays. We have already referred to those which he had been engaged to write for Henslowe, and which no doubt were written and duly performed before the appearance of *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, the first of those actually remaining to us. The year 1599 especially, towards the middle of which *The Shoemaker's Holiday* was published, must have been a year of immense activity. On the 9th and 16th April, Henslowe records a play by Dekker

and Chettle, *Troilus and Cressida.* On the 2nd of May, a payment of five shillings was made to him, "in earnest of a book called *Orestes' Furies,*" and again in the same month there are payments to him and Chettle, for *The Tragedy of Agamemnon.* In July and August, *The Stepmother's Tragedy,* is mentioned; and on the 1st of August, he receives forty shillings "for a book called *Bear-a-brain.*" In September he is associated with Jonson and Chettle, "on account of a play called *Robert the Second, King of Scots Tragedy.*" In January, 1599—1600, a book called *Truth's Supplication to Candlelight* is mentioned, and the next month *The Spanish Moor's Tragedy* in which Haughton and Day appear to have collaborated, and which, it has been thought, is the same as the play called *Lust's Dominion* sometime assigned to Marlowe. This has brought us past the time of the publication of *The Shoemaker's Holiday,* the first edition of which probably appeared in July, 1599, if we are right in taking the entry against the 17th of that month in Henslowe's Diary to refer to the buying of a book actually published, and not one merely in MS.

The Shoemaker's Holiday represents Dekker admirably on the side of his facile humour and bright dramatic realism, as *Old Fortunatus,* which must have followed it very closely, represents him on the more purely poetical side. Taken as a whole, and as a successful accomplishment of what it attempts, this hearty comedy—so

full of overflowing good humour—gives us Dekker on his happiest side. It displays all that genial interest in everything human, all that ready democratic sympathy, which, among the Elizabethans, Dekker has peculiarly displayed. The comedy is indeed the most perfect presentation of the brightness and social interest of the everyday Elizabethan life which is to be found in the English drama. It realises with admirable vividness certain simpler types of character, of which the *people*, as opposed to the aristocratic classes from which most of the dramatists drew their characters, was formed. The craftsman's life, merging itself in the citizen's, is the end and all of the play; the King himself is but a shadow of social eminence compared with the Lord Mayor. Simon Eyre, the shoemaker, jolliest, most exuberant of all comedy types, is the very incarnation of the hearty English character on its prosperous workaday side, untroubled by spiritual misgivings and introspections; and he is so set amidst the rest of the characters as to delightfully fulfil the joyous main intention of the play.

The plot proper, as stated in the prose Argument, dealing with the romance of Lacy and his disguise as a shoemaker in order to win the love of Rose, is of less consequence indeed than the interest centred in the doings of Simon Eyre and his journeymen in the shoemaker's shop. Of these Firk is a capital low-comedy character, a healthy, lusty animal, serving as an excellent dramatic foil to his more delicate companion Ralph, and to

Lacy in his disguise as Hans, the Dutchman. Of the female characters, Eyre's wife is a good sample of foolish, conventional femininity, well realised in the little she has to say and do. The most taking of the female parts, however, is Jane: the whole episode of Ralph's going to the wars, his delayed return to her, her wooing by Hammon, and her final rescue at the last moment by the band of shoemakers, is worked out with singular sweetness, and with great feeling for simple dramatic effect. One of the prettiest scenes in the whole of Dekker, is that where Jane is shown sitting alone in the shop sewing when Hammon approaches, and tries by fair means and foul to win her love. Compared with her, Rose, the heroine in chief, is indistinct. Sybil, the maid, however, is an excellent counterpart to Firk, the feminine to his masculine, as unabashed in her innuendo as he in his blunt animalism.

Taken all through, this "Pleasant Comedy of the Gentle Craft" is one to be remembered with the score or so of the best comedies of pure joy of life which were produced by the Elizabethans; and remembered it probably will be even when Dekker's stronger and maturer work is overlooked. The abounding happiness that fills it is contagious; only here and there the note of trouble for Ralph and Jane occurs to set off the unadulterated comedy of the rest. The whole spirit of the play is expressed in the words of Simon Eyre when he sums up his philosophy for the edification of the Lord Mayor,

who says to him, laughing—"Ha, ha, ha! I had rather than a thousand pound, I had an heart but half so light as yours;" and Eyre replies, "Why, what should I do, my Lord? A pound of care pays not a dram of debt. Hum, let's be merry whiles we are young; old age, sack and sugar, will steal upon us, ere we be aware." As pointed out in the notes to the play, it is worth remembering that Robert Herrick, who was a goldsmith's apprentice in London when the play was first performed there, seems to have in part appropriated these words of Eyre's, and paraphrased them in one of his inimitable verses. Dekker has himself twice overflowed into song in the play, and the shoemaker's drinking-song shows at once the exquisite lyric faculty which he possessed. Its chorus lingers long in the memory as an echo of the happy, boisterous life, well nourished with cakes and ale, of the Elizabethan craftsman :—

> "Trowl the bowl, the jolly nut-brown bowl,
> And here, kind mate, to thee:
> Let's sing a dirge for Saint Hugh's soul,
> And down it merrily."

The Shoemaker's Holiday serves well as an instance of Dekker's realistic method. One sees in it a natural outcome of his prentice life in London, as a shoemaker, a "seamster," or what not. In coming to *Old Fortunatus* on the other hand, we have Dekker as pure poet and idealist. Instead of the lusty zest of comedy, we have the romantic spirit in its perfection; the glamour of romance is

cast over everything. Founded upon one of those fabulous histories in which the sixteenth century so loved to indulge its imagination, the play appeals directly to the sense of wonder and adventure which the poets, playwrights and story-tellers of the day, could always count upon in their audience. As pointed out in the preliminary note to the play, Dekker's version is founded upon an earlier one which was performed some three years before he began his. It would be interesting to discover what the character of the original version was, both in its general lines and in its details. In his admirable book, "Studies in the Literary Relations of England and Germany in the sixteenth century," Mr. C. H. Herford has pointed out the resemblance in certain parts of the original legend and of the play to the story of Faustus. This indirectly leads us to the consideration of how far the writer of the earlier play may have been influenced, if at all, by the dramatic method of Marlowe. For in some parts of Dekker's version, the resemblance in the structure of the blank verse on occasion, and in the scenic and other detail, to Marlowe is striking. Only, in the verse, it is *Tamburlaine* rather than *Dr. Faustus* that is suggested, as for instance in Fortune's address to Fortunatus, when she appears to him with her array of discrowned kings and kings new-created.

> "These have I ruined, and exalted those:
> These hands have conquered Spain: these brows fill up
> The golden circle of rich Portugal,

> Viriat a monarch now, but born a shepherd :
> This Primislaus, a Bohemian King,
> Last day a carter ; this monk Gregory,
> Now lifted to the Papal dignity."

The preceding passage, beginning "Thou shalt be one of Fortune's minions," which contains too a direct reference to—

> "that great Scythian swain,
> Fortune's best minion, warlike Tamburlaine,"

is still more like Marlowe. Dekker's verse, it is true, does not march mail-clad like Marlowe's: it has a plasticity and a suppleness which the other's "mighty line" lacked, while it fails to achieve the same state and sustained dignity. But after all differences are allowed for, there is much in the blank verse in some parts of *Old Fortunatus*, which only Marlowe could have inspired.

This is not said with any thought of depreciating Dekker, who has so often been depreciated in order to add to the lustre of others, but because it marks an interesting point in his development as a poet and dramatist. Two things were enough in themselves to prevent his carrying on the tradition of Marlowe: one, and an insuperable one, his faculty of humour; the second, springing from the first, his lack of that sense of his own artistic dignity, failing which his genius never rose to its potential height. Signs of the power to achieve the very highest in poetry are scattered extravagantly all through *Old Fortunatus*, so that one does not

wonder at Charles Lamb's tremendous compliment. There are lines in it which have rarely been surpassed, and there are fewer lapses in the play than is usual with Dekker, in the inspired recklessness of his method. Dekker's theory of blank verse, in especial, was not a severe one. It admitted of a free interspersion of rhymed lines, and of other dubious modifications of the strict measure. But it is remarkable how successful many of the passages are in spite of these irregularities. Dekker had the privilege of genius, and the faculty of putting into words that rhythmical unction and natural charm which defy the exacter laws of prosody.

Part of the structural defects of the play are due to one of those exigencies to which the Elizabethan playwrights were peculiarly liable. Mr. C. H. Herford, in the book before alluded to, has shewn that Dekker had practically finished the play on the lines of the original fable of Fortunatus, when it was ordered for performance at Court, whereupon further special additions were made with a view to this. Thus, it will be perceived that there are two prologues; while a serious interference with the original lines of the play is shown in the intrusion of Virtue and Vice, in the fashion of a "Masque" or "Triumph," so as to upset the simple dramatic motive of the supremacy of Fortune. In this way, as Mr. Herford says, the right moral tension of the tragedy gives way to the decorous conventionalities of the

Masque. For, the apparent moral effect gained by the triumph of Virtue over Vice and over Fortune is only one of appearance. Dekker had already, according to his wont, moralised the original story, which is innocent of moral intention. For instance, Andelocia, who like Fortunatus is in Dekker's hands a prodigal upon whom Fortune wreaks a tragic retribution, is in the original romance a hero to the last, using the immoral supremacy afforded by the Purse and Wishing Cap without either moral recoil or material injury to himself.

There are other parts, fine in themselves, but insufficiently related to the main line of the plot, whose inconsequence can not be excused because of any exterior later addition, as for instance, the Orleans episode. It is hard, at the same time, to have to find fault with an intrusion which has resulted so delightfully in itself; and we may best take leave of the play in the tempered eulogy of Mr. J. Addington Symonds, who, after speaking of certain of these defects, goes on to say, "Among the poet's most perfect achievements, however, are the scenes in which Orleans indulges a lover's lunacy in a passion of wild fancies. To quote passages would be to murder the effect. Nothing can be imagined finer than the paradoxes of this witty fanatic, in whose opinion the whole world is mad and he the only wise man left; who scorns the scorn of sober folk, extols deformity, and adores the very horns that sprout upon his lady's brow.

The mastery of Dekker is shown throughout this comedy in the flesh and blood reality which he has given to abstractions; even the subordinate characters define each a clearly defined quality. Fortunatus and his sons have a higher degree of reality; while Virtue, Vice, and Fortune, withdrawn from human action and anxiety, survey the world from thrones and feel such passions only as befits immortals. They enter and depart in pomps and pageants to solemn strains of music. . . . . To have conceived the comedy of *Old Fortunatus* proves Dekker a poet of no common order. A little more firmness in its ground-plan would have made it a masterpiece."[1]

It may seem that undue attention has been given to these two plays, but in them will be found so characteristic an embodiment of Dekker's qualities as a playwright,—as a realistic writer of comedy and as a romantic poet, that they serve as an admirable illustration of the whole of his dramatic works. The next play of which we have any record is the famous burlesque upon Ben Jonson, *Satiromastix*, which was published in 1602. As an artistic whole, this deserves, no doubt, all that has been said against it; Dekker's awkward fashion of interweaving two more or less inconsequent dramatic motives was never displayed more unfortunately. But as a young poet's retort upon an unsparing antagonist of Ben Jonson's autocratic position, the thing is surely not contemptible.

[1] "The Academy," vol. v., 1874, pp. 136-7.

The exaggerated reproduction of Jonson's Captain Tucca, in especial, which has been pointed to as proving a lack of invention on Dekker's part, was no doubt one of the favourite hits of the piece, an out-Heroding of Herod which could not fail to immensely tickle the playgoers of the day. And the appearance of Horace cleverly got up in imitation of the author of *The Poetaster*, labouring over an ode by candlelight, must have brought down the house.

"O me thy priest inspire,
For I to thee and thine immortal name,
In—sacred raptures flowing, flowing—swimming, swimming:
In sacred raptures swimming,
Immortal name, game, dame, tame, lame, lame, lame,
—— —— hath,—shame, proclaim, oh?—
In sacred raptures flowing, will proclaim, not—
O me thy priest inspire!
For I to thee and thine immortal name,
In flowing numbers filled with sprite and flame,
(Good, Good!) In flowing numbers filled with sprite and flame."

What is remarkable about Dekker's retort is its perfect good-humour; there is not a trace of vindictiveness in all its satire. Dekker probably took up the cudgels, as beforetime he first entered upon the literary career, more "for the fun of it," than with any very deliberate or serious intention. Though the episode of Cœlestine has no conceivable reference to the "Untrussing of the Humourous Poet," it is worth turning to for its own sake. Mr. Swinburne's conjecture that this part of the play was originally designed for another purpose, and was only used here for want of material to fill out

the Jonson burlesque to the required length, is probably the correct one.

The reputation which Dekker won by *Satiromastix* seems to have been the cause of something of a new departure in the year following its publication; we find him then appearing for the first time as a prose-writer. He had already been engaged in writing *Canaan's Calamity.; the Destruction of Jerusalem,* in sensational doggrel,—the wretched hack-work of a few hasty hours, no doubt, written for some urgent bookseller, which I am afraid there is no sufficient reason to think with Mr. Swinburne that he did not compose. And now he may be said to have seriously begun his career as a man of letters, as distinct from a playwright, by the publication of an interesting work whose title-page well suggests its contents. The title runs:—*The Wonderful Year:* "Wherein is shewed the picture of London lying sick of the Plague. At the end of all (like a merry Epilogue to a dull Play) certain tales are cut out in sundry fashions of purpose to shorten the lives of long winter's nights, that lie watching in the dark for us." Passages in this work show clearly enough that Dekker had the making in him too of a prose writer, if he could only learn to master and rightly direct his faculty of words, but there is no pervading sense of the art of prose in it. Immediately following *The Wonderful Year,* however, came another prose-work which in its way is perfect. *The Bachelor's Banquet* is a delightful satire on the life matrimonial, "plea-

santly discoursing the variable humours of women, their quickness of wits and unsearchable deceits." Here we have Dekker at his best. His facile humour for once served him capably from beginning to end, and the result is a satire of inimitable pleasantry, full of his hearty spontaneity of fun, and all the more effective because, like *Satiromastix*, it is so devoid of any real offence. As if to offer atonement for having satirised woman-kind at all, it must have been about this time that he collaborated with Haughton and Chettle, in *The Pleasant Comedy of Patient Grissill*, with its charming picture of a woman's ideal patience. As this play is to be given in a later volume, it need not be examined at length here.

And now, in 1604, we come to the work, of all Dekker's, which most fully and characteristically represents his genius, with its fund of great qualities and great defects — *The Honest Whore*. The second part of the play, it is true, was not published until many years later, but it will be convenient to take both parts together in considering it here, noting only significant changes in style and so forth. With the play as a whole, Hazlitt's well-known criticism has become so inseparably identified and forms so incomparable an exposition, that I prefer to give it here instead of commentary of my own, completing it by what further notes seem to be required.

"Old honest Dekker's Signior Orlando Friscobaldo I shall never forget! I became only of late acquainted with this last-mentioned

worthy character! but the bargain between us is, I trust, for life. We sometimes regret that we had not sooner met with characters like this, that seem to raise, revive, and give a new zest to our being. . . . . The execution is, throughout, as exact as the conception is new and masterly. There is the least colour possible used; the pencil drags; the canvas is almost seen through: but then, what precision of outline, what truth and purity of tone, what firmness of hand, what marking of character! The words and answers all along are so true and pertinent, that we seem to see the gestures, and to hear the tone with which they are accompanied. So when Orlando, disguised, says to his daughter, 'You'll forgive me,' and she replies, 'I am not marble, I forgive you;' or again, when she introduces him to her husband, saying simply, 'It is my father,' there needs no stage-direction to supply the relenting tones of voice or cordial frankness of manner with which these words are spoken. It is as if there were some fine art to chisel thought, and to embody the inmost movements of the mind in every-day actions and familiar speech.

"Simplicity and extravagance of style, homeliness and quaintness, tragedy and comedy, interchangeably set their hands and seals to this admirable production. We find the simplicity of prose with the graces of poetry. The stalk grows out of the ground; but the flowers spread their flaunting leaves in the air. The mixture of levity in the chief character bespeaks the bitterness from which it seeks relief; it is the idle echo of fixed despair, jealous of observation or pity. The sarcasm quivers on the lip, while the tear stands congealed on the eyelid. This 'tough senior,' this impracticable old gentleman, softens into a little child; this choke-pear melts in the mouth like marmalade. In spite of his resolute professions of misanthropy, he watches over his daughter with kindly solicitude; plays the careful housewife; broods over her lifeless hopes; nurses the decay of her husband's fortune, as he had supported her tottering infancy; saves the high-flying Matheo from the gallows more than once, and is twice a father to them. The story has all the romance of private life, all the pathos of bearing up against silent grief, all the tenderness of concealed affection: there is much sorrow patiently borne, and then comes peace. . . . . The manner too in which Infelice, the wife of Hippolito, is made acquainted with her husband's infidelity, is finely dramatic; and in the scene where she convicts him of his injustice, by taxing herself with incontinence first, and then turning his most galling reproaches to her into upbraidings against his own conduct, she acquits herself with infinite spirit and address. The contrivance by which, in the first part, after being supposed dead, she is restored to life, and married to Hippolito, though perhaps a little far-fetched, is affecting and romantic."

It must be constantly borne in mind, when reading the two parts of the play, that an interval of twenty-five years separates them, and that Orlando Friscobaldo is the creation of an obviously more matured imagination than are the characters of the earlier part. Indeed, the way in which Bellafront's casual mention of her father's name in the earlier part is developed into so masterly a characterisation is very significant. In the period between, Dekker had gone through strange and bitter experience. According to Collier, he married early, and a daughter was baptised in his name as early as 1594, and we can only wonder what dark sorrow he had known, that he came to shape out of himself the inexpressible tragi-comedy of Bellafront's shame and her father's love. There is all the difference between youth and age, indeed, in the two parts; and it is impressive to note how a conception, prompted mainly by the humourist's artistic interest in the first instance, came to be wrought out and carried to the end with such a bitter freight of actuality. In this grim masterpiece, Dekker has used his realistic method with terrible sincerity, and yet, with so cunning a grasp of the nettle of shame that with its sting it yields a fragrance as of the perfect flower of love. The weakest parts of the play are those where Dekker conforms most to conventional dramatic methods, as in the forensic contest between Bellafront and Hippolito, which is dramatically weak, though in passages not ineffective. In

Henslowe's Diary, Middleton is mentioned as a collaborator in the play with Dekker, and there are parts of it which might very well be from his hand. Mr. A. H. Bullen conjectures that the scenes where Bellafront is first discovered in her chamber and again the shop scenes where the gallants try to irritate Candido, are chiefly Middleton's. Mr. J. Addington Symonds considers also that the play as a whole has "the movement of one of Middleton's acknowledged plays." Making due allowance for every assistance of the kind, the essential merit of the whole work is so unmistakeably Dekker's, however, that the reader may safely leave Middleton out of court in considering the play as a whole, and put it down as Dekker's to all intents and purposes.

Before the publication of the first part, Dekker had, in 1603, in his *Magnificent Entertainment given to King James*, inserted some lines of Middleton's, which proves that they were in contact about the time when the play was being written. After its publication Dekker apparently gave himself up for a while to prose-writing. In 1606, one of his best known pamphlets, *The Seven Deadly Sins of London*, appeared, which he himself affirmed on the title-page was only a week's work, "Opus Septem Dierum." The satire, though here and there forced, and roughly written, is not unimpressive, and contains many passages of vivid imaginative power. The Seven Deadly Sins, or as Dekker has it, "The Names

of the Actors in this Old Interlude of Iniquity," are not at all what one would be likely to expect. The terms by which they are designated are extravagantly metaphorical, and including "Politic Bankruptism," "Candlelight," and "Shaving," and there is a special addendum to say that "Seven may easily play this, but not without a Devil." Published in the same year, *News from Hell, brought by the Devil's Carrier*, which resolves itself into "The Devil's Answer to Pierce Pennylesse," is a confused, gruesomely humoresque description of the nether regions, and of a Mephistophelian journey thence to London and other places in the upper world. *The Double PP*, a rather ungainly satire on the Papists, partly in prose, partly in verse, inspired by the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, also appeared in 1606.

The year 1607 shows Dekker at his worst as a playwright. The production of *The Whore of Babylon* marks the low-water mark of his unfortunate career. It is a sort of allegory, presenting Elizabeth as Titania, and other national and international topics in a hopelessly cumbrous disguise. As a rule Dekker illuminates even his hastiest productions with some gleam of true humour or imagination, but here there is hardly a redeeming touch of either, or, if one does exist, the dull atmosphere of the whole keeps it hidden from sight. Dekker atoned a little for his sins as a playwright in this year, however, by the issue of an interesting miscellany of prose writings, whose

comprehensive title may be quoted in full:—*Jests to make you Merry*: "With the Conjuring up of Cock Watt (the Walking Spirit of Newgate) to tell tales. Unto which is added the Misery of a Prison, and a Prisoner. And a Paradox in Praise of Serjeants. Written by T. D. and George Wilkins." George Wilkins, says Dr. Grosart, "was in a small way a contemporary playwright;" and it is impossible to say exactly what share he may have had in this strange composition. But some of the little stories among the "Jests" bear very clearly Dekker's touch, and "The Misery of a Prison and a Prisoner" is unmistakeably the pitiful and bitter expression of his own sorry experiences. In this year was also re-issued under the new title of *A Knight's Conjuring done in Earnest, discovered in Jest*, the before-mentioned *News from Hell*, without anything to show that the book was chiefly a republication. There are some few additions to it, however, including an interesting vision of Chaucer, Spenser, Marlowe, Greene, Peele, and Nash in the haunts of Apollo.

Now, too, we find Dekker in collaboration with Webster, in the plays *Westward Ho*, *Northward Ho*, and *Sir Thomas Wyatt*. Of these, the first two are lively comedies of intrigue, affording many striking pictures of contemporary life, grossly realistic often, but not more so than is usual in comedies of the time. In *Northward Ho* the social diversions of the Greenshields and the Mayberrys are amusingly contrived, and there are passages

in *Westward Ho* of a higher and poetic kind, as in the passage (Act iv., Sc. ii.) quoted by Mr. J. A. Symonds in his essay on Dekker:—

> "Go let Music
> Charm with her excellent voice an awful silence
> Through all this building, that her sphery soul
> May, on the wings of air, in thousand forms,
> Invisibly fly, yet be enjoyed."

The speeches of the earl in this play contain other rare imaginative touches, in strange contrast with the reckless farcical tenour of the piece generally. *Sir Thomas Wyatt* is less satisfactory, a medley of absurd printer's errors adding to the confusion of what was probably a confused work at best. Marston's protest, as to the unfairness of taking seriously and critically plays which were hastily and carelessly written to meet the demand of the hour, must be remembered in judging plays like this. In addition to the plays which their authors revised and set forth with their deliberate *imprimatur*, many were written without any idea of publication; the playwrights looked upon them merely as a sort of journalism, which they did not wish to have judged by permanent artistic standards. It would be waste of time to deliberate over the exact share to be alloted to Dekker and Webster in these three plays. It will be noted, however, in the two comedies, that certain of the characters, as the Welsh captain and Hans in *Northward Ho*, speak in a dialect suspiciously like that of the dialect parts in Dekker's other plays.

For the next two or three years Dekker appears to have occupied himself again chiefly with prose. In 1608 appeared *The Bellman of London*, which is a sort of unconventional cyclopedia of thieving and vagabondage, containing much curious information about the shady side of Elizabethan life. Its importance in relation to Dekker's fondness for the same subject-maker in his plays, however, is somewhat lessened when we discover that the work is partly appropriated from a book first published about forty years before, in 1567, entitled *A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors, vulgarly called Vagabonds;* by Thomas Harman. *The Bellman of London* seems to have been successful; for it was followed the next year by a second book of the same kind, *Lanthorn and Candle-light; or, The Bellman's Second Night Walk:* also in part taken from Harman. In 1609 *The Gull's Horn-book*, which has already been referred to, was published,—by far the most important and interesting of all Dekker's prose works. Its value will be apparent from the passages already quoted, but to anyone who wishes to realise intimately the every-day life of the time, and its relation to Dekker's own environment, the book is simply indispensable. The initial conception, like most of Dekker's conceptions, was not original. The idea of it is taken from a Dutch book which Dekker had thought of translating into English verse, but, finding difficulties in the way, he decided instead to write a new prose work on the same lines. The

earlier parts of the book are the least reliable, as here Dekker made free use of the Dutch original; but from Chap. iv., "How a Gallant should behave Himself in Paul's Walk," onwards, the book is probably as true as it is humorously realistic in its descriptions, forming a delightful prose complement to the plays. The rest of Dekker's prose works, interesting as they are in themselves, have not enough bearing upon the plays to warrant me in any lengthy examination of them. Between the two "Bellman" books appeared *The Dead Term; or, Westminster's Complaint for Long Vacations and Short Terms*, which, amid some extravagance, contains a great deal in the way of description of London life, which is picturesque and historically valuable. In 1609 two other works followed or preceded *The Gull's Horn-book*. The most valuable of the two is entitled, *Work for Armourers; or, the Peace is Broken*, which contains some suggestive autobiographical references to Dekker's delight in history, to the hard lot of poetry and the drama, and to many other matters, interesting, personally, in approaching its main fancifully treated thesis of the struggle between *Poverty and Money*. *The Raven's Almanack*, the second of the two, is chiefly a budget of stories, with "A Song sung by an Old Woman in a Meadow," which has something of Dekker's rougher lyrical quality in it.

In 1611 Dekker and Middleton came together again, and wrote conjointly *The Roaring Girl*, a

vigorous comedy, whose heroine, Moll Cutpurse, goes about in the guise of a gallant, and wreaks summary vengeance upon offenders. In spite of her aggressive masculinity, she is somehow made in her way really attractive. Some of the scenes, as those in the "Sempster's" shop, and those in which the Gallipots and Tiltyards go duck-hunting, are full of contemporary colour. The Mayoralty Pageant of 1612 has already been mentioned. In that year also appeared an absurd semi-allegorical dramatic fantasy by Dekker, founded upon Machiavelli's "Belphegor,"—*If this be not a Good Play the Devil is in it*, in which Devils, Zanies, Friars, Dancing Girls, and other human and superhuman elements are wrought into a curious medley of utter nonsense with real humour and fancy. From 1613 to 1616, Oldys informs us that Dekker was in prison again. An interesting and pathetic letter exists from him to Alleyne, who must have acted generously towards him throughout; the letter is dated "King's Bench, Sept. 12, 1616." It is significant that in the first year of his re-imprisonment, he issued a very remarkable book of prayers, entitled *The Four Birds of Noah's Ark*, to the profound eloquence and power of devotional expression in which, as in "A Prayer for a Soldier," Mr. Swinburne has paid a well-deserved tribute. With *A Strange Horse-Race*, published also in 1613, were included the singular piece of humour,—"The Devil's last Will and Testament," and another prose fantasy, "The Bankrupt's Banquet." A much more

notable work is *Dekker his Dream*, which is mainly in verse. It is a rough and unpolished piece of work, most interesting autobiographically, but full of vigorous and sometimes very imaginative descriptions, and with occasional fine passages, as two lines, taken almost at random, will testify :—

> "Each man was both the lion and the prey,
> And every corn-field an Aceldema."

Dekker did not emerge again as a playwright until 1622, when he appears with still another collaborator, the last man whom one would have expected him to work with,—Massinger. They wrote together *The Virgin Martyr*, which is, as might be expected, a patchwork of incongruous qualities: Dekker probably supplied both the weakest and the strongest parts of the play, the atrocious humorous passages, equally with the exquisitely tender scene, for instance, between Dorothea, the Virgin Martyr, and Angelo, "a good spirit, serving Dorothea in the habit of a Page." This is the scene which won from Charles Lamb in his "Specimens of the Elizabethan Dramatists," his unbounded tribute to Dekker's genius; and as the scene can be turned to there, I need not repeat it here, as I should otherwise be inclined to do.

There is no record of the next five years of Dekker's life. In 1628 and 1629 he again wrote the Mayoralty pageants under title *Britannia's Honour*, and *London's Tempe*, which at best con-

tain glimpses of his true quality. In 1631, *Match Me in London*, a comedy of court intrigue in civic life, has something of his real genius again. It was in the dedicatory note of this play, to "The Noble Lover, and deservedly beloved, of the Muses, Ludovick Carlisle, Esquire, Gentleman of the Bows, and Groom of the King and Queen's Privy-Chamber," that Dekker so pathetically referred to his voice, "Decaying with my Age." But comparatively with some of the second-rate pieces of ten, and even twenty years before, there is little sign of decay. *Match Me in London* shows, it is true, the prose side of Dekker's dramatic faculty, rather than its side of poetic exuberance; but the piece is as full of Dekker's old picturesque realism and genial humanity, as ever. The street and shop scenes, supposed to be placed chiefly in Seville, might just as well be in London: Dekker transfers the 'Counter' there without hesitation, and except for occasional doubtful attempts at Spanish local colour, the whole play is as native as anything Dekker has done. The plot turns chiefly upon the attempt of the King to corrupt Tormiella, one of the brightest and most taking of all Dekker's heroines, whose guileless fidelity to her husband is delicately portrayed. The usual sub-plot in which Don John, the King's brother, conspires for the throne, is less inconsequent than most of Dekker's supplementary plots, and the whole comedy is managed with a higher sense of dramatic form than Dekker often showed. *Match Me in*

London, as being entirely Dekker's own composition, certainly deserves to rank with his half-dozen best plays, and I am sorry that it was not possible to find room for it in this edition, although the same ground has already been partly covered in his other comedies.

I confess I find it hard to understand how anyone can seriously prefer *The Wonder of a Kingdom*, which appeared some few years later, to *Match Me in London*, as Mr. J. A. Symonds has done. In the former we find Dekker for once working without any real pervading humanity; there are touches of his usual heartiness in it, but as a whole it is a heartless production—more a cold study of motives and passions than a sympathetic re-creation of them in forms of art. It was highly appropriate, indeed, that Dekker long before had been chosen as a champion to meet Ben Jonson, for the two men mark very clearly two types of poet and artist. Jonson in his plays worked largely from the mere curiosity about men's passions and motives, he wrought conceptions which sprang too often from an analytical interest, rather than the emotional human impulse which drives the poet to reflect men's strifes and destinies for simple love's sake. With Dekker it was different. Without perhaps consciously realising it, he worked mainly from this impulse of the heart, putting himself passionately into all that he characterised, in his exuberant, careless way. For once, however, in *The Wonder of a Kingdom*, he

seems to have laid aside something of his natural kindliness. The episode of old Lord Vanni's intrigue with Alphonsina is repulsive, unvisited as it is by even ordinary comedy retribution. It is only fair to allow, however, that Dekker's kindlier quality crops up in some scenes of the play, and Hazlitt's testimony to Gentili, "that truly ideal character of a magnificent patron," may be set against the comment of the German critic, Dr. Schmidt, who has said very truly,—"That the youthful fire which fills *Fortunatus* is in this drama extinguished."

Although the two remaining plays which Dekker wrote with Ford, *The Sun's Darling* and *The Witch of Edmonton*, were not published till 1656 and 1658 respectively, they were certainly written and performed long before *Match Me in London*, probably helping to fill up the five blank years following that in which *The Virgin Martyr* appeared. *The Sun's Darling* is a charming conception, inadequately wrought out, but nevertheless full of facile and exuberant poetic quality. The lyrics, especially, the best of which are undoubtedly Dekker's, are so fresh and full of impulse that one inclines to think that they date back to the first half of his life. Some of these have found their way, infrequently, into the anthologies, as that beginning, "What bird so sings, yet so does wail," and again the delightful country song, in which one can forgive the mixture of musk-roses and daffodils, haymaking and hunting, lambs

and partridges, in defiance of all rustic tradition, for the sake of its catching tune :—

> " Hay-makers, rakers, reapers and mowers,
> Wait on your Summer Queen.
> Dress up with musk-rose her eglantine bowers,
> Daffadils strew the green. . . ."

The hero of this Moral Masque, as the authors term it,—Raybright, "The Sun's Darling," is shown in progression through the seasons under the Sun's guidance, which he perverts in his restless pursuit of sensuous pleasure. All these scenes are full of suggestions of beauty, but they are imperfectly realised. Exquisite passages occur, however, as in the scene where Spring, Health, Youth, and Delight appear to Raybright, and Spring, wooing him in vain, proffers him the bay-tree :—

> " That tree shall now be thine, about it sit
> All the old poets, with fresh laurel crowned,
> Singing in verse the praise of chastity."

When it is too late, Raybright, filled with love for the Spring, is seized with remorse: so in turn all the seasons pass by, while Humour and Folly lead him always astray. The Sun's peroration in addressing Raybright at the end of his foiled career is a solemn and profound, if rather fanciful, summing-up of life. Altogether *The Sun's Darling* forms a valuable later complement to *Old Fortunatus*, and it is only to be regretted that its authors did not bestow upon it the longer, patient labour which would have made it worthy of its conception.

The Witch of Edmonton, the second play in

which Ford and Dekker worked conjointly, is so utterly different to *The Sun's Darling* that one finds it difficult to believe that the same hands can have been concerned in its production. Possibly the initial conception was Rowley's, and though it would not be easy to differentiate his exact share in any special scene or passage, there is a considerable residuum which marks itself off as unlike the work of Dekker or Ford. Dekker's share is more apparent. The scenes where Cuddy Banks and his fellow villagers disport themselves, some of those where the Witch herself appears, and again those of Susan's love and sorrow, have by general critical consent been awarded to him. Part of the severer tragedy in the terrible hallucination of Mother Sawyer, however, which has generally been considered Dekker's, I fancy bears the stamp of Ford. In his essay on Ford, Mr. Swinburne has essayed a comparison of the parts due severally to Dekker and to Ford, which is too important to be overlooked. He would assign the part of Mother Sawyer chiefly to Dekker. "In all this part of the play I trace the hand of Dekker; his intimate and familiar sense of wretchedness, his great and gentle spirit of compassion for the poor and suffering with whom his own lot in life was so often cast, in prison and out." The part of Susan also, he allots to Dekker; and of the scene where Frank Thorney's guilt is discovered, he remarks suggestively: "The interview of Frank with the disguised Winifred in this scene may be compared by the

student of dramatic style with the parting of the same characters at the close; the one has all the poignant simplicity of Dekker, the other all the majestic energy of Ford."

The dates of publication of the two last plays bring us far beyond the time of Dekker's death, of which, however, we have no record at all. None of his prose works reach so late a period; the last is *A Rod for Runaways*, published in 1625. Collier, who always made his evidence go as far as possible, himself admits that there is no further trace of him after 1638, the year when Milton wrote *Lycidas*, the year when Scotland was ominously signing the Covenant. In the further oncoming of the Civil War, Dekker disappears altogether, as uncertainly as he first entered the scene.

In summing up this strange life and its dramatic outcome, it is easily seen what is to be said on the adverse side. Dekker had, let us admit, great defects. He was the type of the prodigal in literature,—the kindhearted, irresponsible poet whom we all know, and love, and pardon seventy times seven. But it is sad to think that with a little of the common talent which every successful man of affairs counts as part of his daily equipment, he might have left a different record. He never attained the serious conception of himself and his dignity as a worker which every poet, every artist must have, who would take effect proportionate to his genius. He never seemed to become conscious

in any enduring way of his artistic function, and he constantly threw aside, under pressure of the moment, those standards of excellence which none knew better than he how to estimate. But after all has been said, he remains, by his faults as well as by his faculties, one of the most individual, one of the most suggestive, figures of the whole Elizabethan circle. Because of the breath of simple humanity in them, his works leave a sense of brightness and human encouragement whose charm lingers when many more careful monuments of literary effort are forgotten. His artistic sincerity has resulted in a picture of life as he saw it, unequalled for its sentiment, for its living spirit of tears and laughter, as well as for its outspoken truth. His homely realism brings before us all the pleasant everyday bustle of the Elizabethan streets—the craftsmen and prentices, the citizens at their shop doors, the gallants in the Middle Aisle of St. Paul's. The general feeling is that of a summer's morning in the pleasant Cheapside of those days—more like the street of a little market-town than the Cheapside of to-day—where in the clear sunny air the alert cry of the prentices, "What do you lack?" rings out cheerily, and each small incident of the common life is touched with vivid colour. And if the night follows, dark and haunted by grim passions and sorrows, and the King's Bench waits for poor poets not far away, this poet who had known the night and the prison only too well! sang so undauntedly, that the terrors of them fell away at the sound,

As he had this faith in the happy issue out of his own troubles, so Dekker looked unflinchingly as a poet upon the grim and dark side of human life, seeing it to emerge presently, bright in the higher vision of earth and Heaven. Much that at first seems gratuitously obscene and terrible in his dramatic presentation may in this way be accepted with the same vigorous apprehension of the comedy and tragedy of life, which he himself showed. The whole justification of his lifework, indeed, is to be found in these words of his, from the dedicatory epistle to *His Dream*, which we may well take as his parting behest :—"So in these of mine, though the Devil be in the one, God is in the other: nay in both. What I send you, may perhaps seem bitter, yet it is wholesome; your best physic is not a julep; sweet sauces leave rotten bodies. There is a Hell named in our Creed, and a Heaven, and the Hell comes before; if we look not into the first, we shall never live in the last."

ERNEST RHYS.

NOTE: Students of Dekker will find Pearson's Edition of his Plays in 4 Vols., published in 1873, and Dr. Grosart's edition of his Non-Dramatic Works, in 5 Vols., published in the Huth Library, 1885-6, sufficient for all ordinary purposes. There are no notes, however, in Dr. Grosart's reprint, and the notes to the plays in Pearson's edition are few and far between. Mr. Swinburne's article on Dekker (*Nineteenth Century*, January, 1887), will be found valuable also.

THE OLD FORTUNE THEATRE.

(*See Frontispiece.*)

THE original Fortune Theatre was built on the site of an old timber house standing in a large garden near Golden Lane, Cripplegate, and said to have been formerly a nursery for Henry the Eighth's children, who were sent to this then suburban spot for the benefit of the air. Edward Alleyn the actor acquired the lease of the house and grounds on December 22, 1599, and, early the following year, supported by the Lord Admiral (the Earl of Nottingham), to whose company of players he belonged, he, in conjunction with Henslowe, his father-in-law, employed Peter Streete to build there "a newe house and stadge for a Plaiehowse" for the sum of £440.

Alleyn notes his acquisition of the lease and his expenditure upon the new theatre in the following terms :—

"What the Fortune cost me Novemb., 1599 [1600].
First for the leas to Brew, £240.
Then for the building the playhouse, £520.
For other privat buildings of myn owne, £120.
So in all it has cost me for the leasse, £880.
Bought the inheritance of the land of the Gills of the Ile of Man, which is the Fortune, and all the howses in Whight crosstrett and Gowlding lane, in June, 1610, for the some of £340.
Bought in John Garretts lease in revertion from the Gills for 21 years, for £100.
So in all itt cost me £1320.
Blessed be the Lord God everlasting."

It was at the Fortune that Alleyn's fame as an actor reached its height. He was especially popular in the character of Barabas in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, which he revived at the new theatre. Here also many of the plays written in the whole or part by Dekker were originally performed, as Dekker generally wrote for the Lord Admiral's company, who played regularly at the Fortune under Alleyn and Henslowe's management, while the Lord Chamberlain's company, with whom Shakespeare and Burbadge were associated, played at the Globe.

Some twenty years after the erection of the theatre Alleyn records in his diary under date December 9, 1621, "This night, att 12 of ye clock, ye Fortune was burnt." The year following the theatre was rebuilt, and leased by Alleyn to various persons, he having then decided to retire from the stage. On the suppression of the theatres by the Puritans the inside of the Fortune was destroyed by a company of soldiers, and the lessees failed to pay their rent, whereby a considerable loss was sustained by the authorities of Dulwich College, in whom the property of the Fortune was vested. This eventually led to the Court of Assistants ordering the more dilapidated portions of the theatre to be pulled down, and to their leasing the ground belonging to it for building purposes. So recently, however, as the year 1819, the front of the old theatre was still standing, as represented in the frontispiece to the present volume—a reduced copy of an engraving in Wilkinson's "Londina."

THE SHOEMAKER'S HOLIDAY;

OR A PLEASANT COMEDY OF

THE *SHOEMAKER'S HOLIDAY, or a Pleasant Comedy of the Gentle Craft*, was first published in 1599, as we learn from a passage in Henslowe's Diary; but the earliest known edition is the quarto of 1600, which describes the play as "acted before the Queen's most excellent Maiestie New-years day at night last, by the right honourable the Earle of Nottingham, Lord High Admirall of England, his seruants." Other editions followed in 1610, 1618, and 1657. Of modern editions, Germany has produced the only one which is at all reliable, and upon this edition, admirably collated and edited by Drs. Karl Warnke and Ludwig Proescholdt, and published at Halle in 1886, the present reprint is based, the excellence of text, notes and introduction, leaving little beyond the modernising and some elucidation here and there to be done.

Dekker appears to have had a collaborator in the play in Robert Wilson, the actor, who is said to have created the part of Firk on its performance, but although Wilson may have provided some of the situations and dialogue, the credit of the play as a whole is undoubtedly Dekker's. *The Shoemaker's Holiday* is the first of Dekker's plays, in order of publication, which has survived, although according to Henslowe he began to write for the stage in 1596.

The conception of Simon Eyre, the Shoemaker, is taken from a real person of that name, who, according to Stow, was an upholsterer, and afterwards a draper. He built Leadenhall in 1419, as referred to by Dekker in Act V.,

Sc. 5, became Sheriff of London in 1434, was elected Lord Mayor in 1445, and died in 1459. About his character nothing certain is known. "It may well be," say the editors of the Halle edition, "that long after Eyre's death the builder of Leadenhall was supposed to have been a shoemaker himself, merely because Leadenhall was used as a leather-market. This tradition was probably taken up by the poet, who formed out of it one of the most popular comedies of the age."

TO ALL GOOD FELLOWS, PROFESSORS OF THE GENTLE CRAFT,[1] OF WHAT DEGREE SOEVER.

Kind gentlemen and honest boon companions, I present you here with a merry-conceited Comedy, called *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, acted by my Lord Admiral's Players this present Christmas before the Queen's most excellent Majesty, for the mirth and pleasant matter by her Highness graciously accepted, being indeed no way offensive. The argument of the play I will set down in this Epistle: Sir Hugh Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, had a young gentleman of his own name, his near kinsman, that loved the Lord Mayor's daughter of London; to prevent and cross which love, the Earl caused his kinsman to be sent Colonel of a company into France: who resigned his place to another gentleman his friend, and came disguised like a Dutch shoemaker to the house of Simon Eyre in Tower Street, who served the Mayor and his household with shoes: the merriments that passed in Eyre's house, his coming to be Mayor of London, Lacy's getting his love, and other accidents, with two merry Three-men's-songs. Take all in good worth that is well intended, for nothing is purposed but mirth; mirth lengtheneth long life, which, with all other blessings, I heartily wish you. Farewell!

[1] Shoemaking was called "the Gentle Craft," possibly in part because the patron saints of shoemakers, St. Crispin and St. Hugh, were said to be of noble, and even royal, blood; possibly because of the sedentary nature of the occupation.

PROLOGUE

As it was pronounced before the Queen's Majesty.

As wretches in a storm (expecting day),
With trembling hands and eyes cast up to heaven,
Make prayers the anchor of their conquered hopes,
So we, dear goddess, wonder of all eyes,
Your meanest vassals, through mistrust and fear
To sink into the bottom of disgrace
By our imperfect pastimes, prostrate thus
On bended knees, our sails of hope do strike,
Dreading the bitter storms of your dislike.
Since then, unhappy men, our hap is such,
That to ourselves ourselves no help can bring,
But needs must perish, if your saint-like ears
(Locking the temple where all mercy sits)
Refuse the tribute of our begging tongues:
Oh grant, bright mirror of true chastity,
From those life-breathing stars, your sun-like eyes,
One gracious smile: for your celestial breath
Must send us life, or sentence us to death.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

THE KING.
THE EARL OF CORNWALL.
SIR HUGH LACY, Earl of Lincoln.
ROWLAND LACY, otherwise HANS, } His Nephews.
ASKEW }
SIR ROGER OATELEY, Lord Mayor of London.
Master HAMMON }
Master WARNER } Citizens of London.
Master SCOTT }
SIMON EYRE, the Shoemaker.
ROGER, commonly called HODGE[1] }
FIRK } EYRE'S Journeymen.
RALPH }
LOVELL, a Courtier.
DODGER, Servant to the EARL OF LINCOLN.
A DUTCH SKIPPER.
A BOY.
Courtiers, Attendants, Officers, Soldiers, Hunters, Shoemakers, Apprentices, Servants.

ROSE, Daughter of SIR ROGER.
SYBIL, her Maid.
MARGERY, Wife of SIMON EYRE.
JANE, Wife of RALPH.

SCENE—LONDON and OLD FORD.

[1] A diminutive of Roger.

THE SHOEMAKER'S HOLIDAY.

ACT THE FIRST.

SCENE I.—*A Street in London.*

Enter the LORD MAYOR *and the* EARL OF LINCOLN.

LINCOLN. My lord mayor, you have sundry times
Feasted myself and many courtiers more:
Seldom or never can we be so kind
To make requital of your courtesy.
But leaving this, I hear my cousin Lacy
Is much affected to your daughter Rose.

L. Mayor. True, my good lord, and she loves him so well
That I mislike her boldness in the chase.

Lincoln. Why, my lord mayor, think you it then a shame,
To join a Lacy with an Oateley's name?

L. Mayor. Too mean is my poor girl for his high birth;
Poor citizens must not with courtiers wed,
Who will in silks and gay apparel spend
More in one year than I am worth, by far:
Therefore your honour need not doubt my girl.

Lincoln. Take heed, my lord, advise you what you do!

A verier unthrift lives not in the world,
Than is my cousin; for I'll tell you what:
'Tis now almost a year since he requested
To travel countries for experience;
I furnished him with coin, bills of exchange,
Letters of credit, men to wait on him,
Solicited my friends in Italy
Well to respect him. But to see the end:
Scant had he journeyed through half Germany,
But all his coin was spent, his men cast off,
His bills embezzled,[1] and my jolly coz,
Ashamed to show his bankrupt presence here,
Became a shoemaker in Wittenberg,
A goodly science for a gentleman
Of such descent! Now judge the rest by this:
Suppose your daughter have a thousand pound,
He did consume me more in one half year;
And make him heir to all the wealth you have,
One twelvemonth's rioting will waste it all.
Then seek, my lord, some honest citizen
To wed your daughter to.

L. Mayor. I thank your lordship.
(Aside) Well, fox, I understand your subtilty.
As for your nephew, let your lordship's eye
But watch his actions, and you need not fear,
For I have sent my daughter far enough.
And yet your cousin Rowland might do well,
Now he hath learned an occupation;
And yet I scorn to call him son-in-law.

Lincoln. Ay, but I have a better trade for him:
I thank his grace, he hath appointed him
Chief colonel of all those companies
Mustered in London and the shires about,
To serve his highness in those wars of France.
See where he comes!—

[1] Wasted, squandered.

Enter LOVELL, LACY, *and* ASKEW.

Lovell, what news with you?

Lovell. My Lord of Lincoln, 'tis his highness' will,
That presently your cousin ship for France
With all his powers; he would not for a million,
But they should land at Dieppe within four days.

Lincoln. Go certify his grace, it shall be done.
[*Exit* LOVELL.
Now, cousin Lacy, in what forwardness
Are all your companies?

Lacy. All well prepared.
The men of Hertfordshire lie at Mile-end,
Suffolk and Essex train in Tothill-fields,
The Londoners and those of Middlesex,
All gallantly prepared in Finsbury,
With frolic spirits long for their parting hour.

L. Mayor. They have their imprest,[1] coats, and furniture;[2]
And, if it please your cousin Lacy come
To the Guildhall, he shall receive his pay;
And twenty pounds besides my brethren
Will freely give him, to approve our loves
We bear unto my lord, your uncle here.

Lacy. I thank your honour.

Lincoln. Thanks, my good lord mayor.

L. Mayor. At the Guildhall we will expect your coming. [*Exit.*

Lincoln. To approve your loves to me? No subtilty!
Nephew, that twenty pound he doth bestow
For joy to rid you from his daughter Rose.
But, cousins both, now here are none but friends,
I would not have you cast an amorous eye
Upon so mean a project as the love
Of a gay, wanton, painted citizen.

[1] Regimental badge or device.
[2] Weapons and martial equipment.

I know, this churl even in the height of scorn
Doth hate the mixture of his blood with thine.
I pray thee, do thou so! Remember, coz,
What honourable fortunes wait on thee:
Increase the king's love, which so brightly shines,
And gilds thy hopes. I have no heir but thee,—
And yet not thee, if with a wayward spirit
Thou start from the true bias of my love.

Lacy. My lord, I will for honour, not desire
Of land or livings, or to be your heir,
So guide my actions in pursuit of France,
As shall add glory to the Lacys' name.

Lincoln. Coz, for those words here's thirty Portuguese [1]
And, nephew Askew, there's a few for you.
Fair Honour, in her loftiest eminence,
Stays in France for you, till you fetch her thence.
Then, nephews, clap swift wings on your designs:
Begone, begone, make haste to the Guildhall;
There presently I'll meet you. Do not stay:
Where honour beckons, shame attends delay. [*Exit.*

Askew. How gladly would your uncle have you gone!

Lacy. True, coz, but I'll o'erreach his policies.
I have some serious business for three days,
Which nothing but my presence can dispatch.
You, therefore, cousin, with the companies,
Shall haste to Dover; there I'll meet with you:
Or, if I stay past my prefixèd time,
Away for France; we'll meet in Normandy.
The twenty pounds my lord mayor gives to me
You shall receive, and these ten Portuguese,
Part of mine uncle's thirty. Gentle coz,
Have care to our great charge; I know, your wisdom
Hath tried itself in higher consequence.

Askew. Coz, all myself am yours: yet have this care,
To lodge in London with all secrecy;

[1] A gold coin, worth about three pounds twelve shillings.

Our uncle Lincoln hath, besides his own,
Many a jealous eye, that in your face
Stares only to watch means for your disgrace.

Lacy. Stay, cousin, who be these?

Enter SIMON EYRE, MARGERY *his wife*, HODGE, FIRK, JANE, *and* RALPH *with a pair of shoes.*[1]

Eyre. Leave whining, leave whining! Away with this whimpering, this puling, these blubbering tears, and these wet eyes! I'll get thy husband discharged, I warrant thee, sweet Jane; go to!

Hodge. Master, here be the captains.

Eyre. Peace, Hodge; hush, ye knave, hush!

Firk. Here be the cavaliers and the colonels, master.

Eyre. Peace, Firk; peace, my fine Firk! Stand by with your pishery-pashery,[2] away! I am a man of the best presence; I'll speak to them, an they were Popes. —Gentlemen, captains, colonels, commanders! Brave men, brave leaders, may it please you to give me audience. I am Simon Eyre, the mad shoemaker of Tower Street; this wench with the mealy mouth that will never tire, is my wife, I can tell you; here's Hodge, my man and my foreman; here's Firk, my fine firking journeyman, and this is blubbered Jane. All we come to be suitors for this honest Ralph. Keep him at home, and as I am a true shoemaker and a gentleman of the gentle craft, buy spurs yourselves, and I'll find ye boots these seven years.

Marg. Seven years, husband?

Eyre. Peace, midriff, peace! I know what I do. Peace!

Firk. Truly, master cormorant, you shall do God good service to let Ralph and his wife stay together. She's a young new-married woman; if you take her husband away

[1] The quarto has "with a piece." Piece (old Fr. *bobelin*) was sometimes loosely used for the shoe itself, as well as for the piece of leather used in repairs. See *Cotgrave*.

[2] Twiddle-twaddle.

from her a night, you undo her; she may beg in the day-time; for he's as good a workman at a prick and an awl, as any is in our trade.

Jane. O let him stay, else I shall be undone.

Firk. Ay, truly, she shall be laid at one side like a pair of old shoes else, and be occupied for no use.

Lacy. Truly, my friends, it lies not in my power:
The Londoners are pressed, paid, and set forth
By the lord mayor; I cannot change a man.

Hodge. Why, then you were as good be a corporal as a colonel, if you cannot discharge one good fellow; and I tell you true, I think you do more than you can answer, to press a man within a year and a day of his marriage.

Eyre. Well said, melancholy Hodge; gramercy, my fine foreman.

Marg. Truly, gentlemen, it were ill done for such as you, to stand so stiffly against a poor young wife, considering her case, she is new-married, but let that pass: I pray, deal not roughly with her; her husband is a young man, and but newly entered, but let that pass.

Eyre. Away with your pishery-pashery, your pols and your edipols![1] Peace, midriff; silence, Cicely Bum-trinket! Let your head speak.

Firk. Yea, and the horns too, master.

Eyre. Too soon, my fine Firk, too soon! Peace, scoundrels! See you this man? Captains, you will not release him? Well, let him go; he's a proper shot; let him vanish! Peace, Jane, dry up thy tears, they'll make his powder dankish. Take him, brave men; Hector of Troy was an hackney to him, Hercules and Termagant[2] scoundrels, Prince Arthur's Round-table—by the Lord of Ludgate[3]—ne'er fed such a tall, such a dapper swords-

[1] Apparently one of Eyre's frequent improvised phrases, referring here to his wife's trick of repeating herself, as in her previous speech.

[2] An imaginary Saracen god, represented in the old moralities and plays as of a quite ungodly tendency to violence.

[3] A nick-name, possibly, for some character of the day, used with a vague reference to King Lud.

man ; by the life of Pharaoh, a brave, resolute swordsman ! Peace, Jane ! I say no more, mad knaves.

Firk. See, see, Hodge, how my master raves in commendation of Ralph !

Hodge. Ralph, th'art a gull, by this hand, an thou goest not.

Askew. I am glad, good Master Eyre, it is my hap
To meet so resolute a soldier.
Trust me, for your report and love to him,
A common slight regard shall not respect him.

Lacy. Is thy name Ralph ?

Ralph. Yes, sir.

Lacy. Give me thy hand ;
Thou shalt not want, as I am a gentleman.
Woman, be patient ; God, no doubt, will send
Thy husband safe again ; but he must go,
His country's quarrel says it shall be so.

Hodge. Th'art a gull, by my stirrup, if thou dost not go. I will not have thee strike thy gimlet into these weak vessels ; prick thine enemies, Ralph.

Enter DODGER.

Dodger. My lord, your uncle on the Tower-hill
Stays with the lord mayor and the aldermen,
And doth request you with all speed you may,
To hasten thither.

Askew. Cousin, let's go.

Lacy. Dodger, run you before, tell them we come.—
This Dodger is mine uncle's parasite, [*Exit* DODGER.
The arrant'st varlet that e'er breathed on earth ;
He sets more discord in a noble house
By one day's broaching of his pickthank tales,[1]
Than can be salved again in twenty years,
And he, I fear, shall go with us to France,
To pry into our actions.

[1] Tales told to curry favour.

Askew. Therefore, coz,
It shall behove you to be circumspect.

Lacy. Fear not, good cousin.—Ralph, hie to your colours.

Ralph. I must, because there's no remedy;
But, gentle master and my loving dame,
As you have always been a friend to me,
So in mine absence think upon my wife.

Jane. Alas, my Ralph.

Marg. She cannot speak for weeping.

Eyre. Peace, you cracked groats,[1] you mustard tokens,[2] disquiet not the brave soldier. Go thy ways, Ralph!

Jane. Ay, ay, you bid him go; what shall I do
When he is gone?

Firk. Why, be doing with me or my fellow Hodge; be not idle.

Eyre. Let me see thy hand, Jane. This fine hand, this white hand, these pretty fingers must spin, must card, must work; work, you bombast-cotton-candle-quean;[3] work for your living, with a pox to you.—Hold thee, Ralph, here's five sixpences for thee; fight for the honour of the gentle craft, for the gentlemen shoemakers, the courageous cordwainers, the flower of St. Martin's, the mad knaves of Bedlam, Fleet Street, Tower Street and Whitechapel; crack me the crowns of the French knaves; a pox on them, crack them; fight, by the Lord of Ludgate; fight, my fine boy!

Firk. Here, Ralph, here's three twopences: two carry into France, the third shall wash our souls at parting, for sorrow is dry. For my sake, firk the *Basa mon cues.*

Hodge. Ralph, I am heavy at parting; but here's a

[1] The groat was the silver fourpenny-piece. The simile of a cracked coin is an obvious expression of worthlessness.

[2] Little yellow spots on the body which denoted the infection of the plague.

[3] Another of Eyre's improvised phrases, whose component parts sufficiently explain its meaning.

shilling for thee. God send thee to cram thy slops with French crowns, and thy enemies' bellies with bullets.

Ralph. I thank you, master, and I thank you all.
Now, gentle wife, my loving lovely Jane,
Rich men, at parting, give their wives rich gifts,
Jewels and rings, to grace their lily hands.
Thou know'st our trade makes rings for women's heels:
Here take this pair of shoes, cut out by Hodge,
Stitched by my fellow Firk, seamed by myself,
Made up and pinked with letters for thy name.
Wear them, my dear Jane, for thy husband's sake;
And every morning, when thou pull'st them on,
Remember me, and pray for my return.
Make much of them; for I have made them so,
That I can know them from a thousand mo.

Drum sounds. Enter the LORD MAYOR, *the* Earl *of* LINCOLN, LACY, ASKEW, DODGER, *and* Soldiers. *They pass over the stage;* RALPH *falls in amongst them;* FIRK *and the rest cry* "Farewell," etc., *and so exeunt.*

ACT THE SECOND.

SCENE I.—*A Garden at Old Ford.*

Enter ROSE, *alone, making a garland.*

OSE. Here sit thou down upon this flow'ry bank,
And make a garland for thy Lacy's head.
These pinks, these roses, and these violets,
These blushing gilliflowers, these marigolds,
The fair embroidery of his coronet,
Carry not half such beauty in their cheeks,
As the sweet countenance of my Lacy doth.
O my most unkind father! O my stars,
Why lowered you so at my nativity,
To make me love, yet live robbed of my love?
Here as a thief am I imprisonëd
For my dear Lacy's sake within those walls,
Which by my father's cost were builded up
For better purposes; here must I languish
For him that doth as much lament, I know,
Mine absence, as for him I pine in woe.

Enter SYBIL.

Sybil. Good morrow, young mistress. I am sure you make that garland for me; against I shall be Lady of the Harvest.

Rose. Sybil, what news at London?